

## WRITTEN IN RED

CHAS. HOWARD MONTAGUE AND C. W. DYAR

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He smoothed her hair. He wiped away her tears. He induced her to take a little more of the brandy. By repeatedly assuring her that her sister was in no danger, and afterwards by turning her attention to other things, he brought her once more into a condition of sanity. She was not permitted to test her strength upon her feet, but she sat up against a tree, and began to regard her companion with great, round, wistful eyes, with an air of mingled timidity and impulsive confidence.

"And now, Miss North," said Thomas at last, "it is absolutely necessary that I should leave you for a few minutes. Will you promise me not to stir until I return? I will be gone just as short a time as possible."

"You are so kind," she said, faintly. "If it is for me you are going, I hope, really, you won't trouble yourself. In a few minutes I shall be stronger and can go on."

"Well, talk about that after I come back," he said, cheerfully. "And meantime I have your promise not to stir?"

"Since you are so good, I can refuse you nothing," she returned, wearily, and closed her eyes.

Thomas was off at an energetic pace. He first tied his horse to a tree, and then ran to the nearest farm house. A well-to-do-looking woman, with a sunny face, appeared at the door in answer to his knock.

"Madam," said Thomas, hastily, "I have to apologize for my unexpected call, but the fact is I am in great need of food—the best you have and plenty of it. I'll pay—anything. Only let me have it at once."

"But I can't," said the woman; "I haven't a thing in the house to eat!"

"But I must have something," exclaimed Thomas. "If it's nothing but milk and water. The case is very urgent. Here, do what you can for me."

He thrust a five-dollar bill into the good woman's hand. She thrust it back promptly.

"Here, I don't want your money," she said, rather stiffly. "Such as I have you're welcome to. Come in."

She led the astonished Thomas into an ample pantry, which was in a condition of neatness that was almost painful. But it needed no power of divination to determine that it was the pride of the good woman's life, and the shelves fairly groaned with good things. Thomas was dumb with delighted amazement.

"Well," said the housewife, evidently enjoying the condition of stupefaction to which she had reduced him, "do you see anything you'd like? If so, you are welcome."

"The fact is," said Thomas, "I wish you'd let me pay for it. I—I—see, I might carry away a little more than I'd like to; for the fact is I've got a friend just back here in the woods, and she—he's starving to death."

The woman laughed outright. Of course, she did not believe that anybody was dying for the want of food in this land of plenty. The best Thomas could do was to effect a compromise. The woman accepted a dollar for the heathen. Thomas took away all he could well carry.

As the reporter approached the place where he had left Stella North, he began to have some fears that she had deserted him in spite of her promise; but, no. There she was, still sitting against the tree, as he had left her. No, not as he had left her. Completely exhausted, she had fallen asleep.

Thomas placed his bundles upon the ground and softly arranged the repast he had secured from the farm house upon a light robe he had taken from the carriage. From the bowl of fresh milk to the golden-brown custard pie it was genuine and wholesome; and though he would fain have had Young's chief cook at his command for an hour or two, still he hoped that she could not fail to find the display attractive and appetizing.

But he hesitated to wake her. The poor child slept as only one utterly worn out can sleep. He looked at her more attentively, and his heart accelerated its pulsations.

"What a pity," he thought, "that she should be so compromisingly mixed up in such an affair as this! Young and charming as she is, if the police knew what I know they would not hesitate a minute to arrest her."

The thought clouded his breast. He looked at his watch. It was getting late. Unless he proposed to turn her over to the police, in truth, time pressed.

"Ahem!" he exclaimed. "Miss North!"

But her sleep was too deep to be disturbed by such an expedient. He placed his hand gently upon her shoulder, and a thrill ran through him at the contact. She started up and stared wildly about her. Gradually the truth came to her. She awoke from a happy oblivion to the horror of the past few days. The sudden frightened look in her face proclaimed this fact. And then her eyes wandered from the reporter's face to the collation spread at her feet.

"For me!" she exclaimed. "Oh!"

But nothing but tears bespoke her thanks. She was evidently ashamed to betray herself so; but she was too weak to prevent it. She covered her face with her hands and sank down at the foot of the tree.

"You think me foolish, I know," she stammered.

"Not a bit of it," said Thomas. "I think you're nerves are quite unstrung, because you haven't taken nourishment enough. Eat something, Miss North, I beg of you; and, my word for it, you'll feel better."

By dint of much persuasion and adroit management he reassured her, so that she actually smiled the very

ghost of a smile, but it betrayed the presence of a merry dimple in her cheek, which Thomas thought quite charming.

"How can I thank you?" she murmured.

"By eating all you can," he returned.

And she did endeavor to show her gratitude in that way. From time to time she looked at him with a glance of dread and apprehension.

"You are not afraid of me, Miss North, I hope?" he said at last, pleasantly. He was smiling now, as he sat on a rock near by watching her eat, which she did with that ravenous appetite that comes of absolute starvation.

"Excuse me," she said, after an evident effort, "but you are the same gentleman who called at our house—who used to know my father?"

Thomas flushed a little and his eyes fell.

"Miss North," he said, "I don't intend to deceive you. I am a newspaper reporter."

She uttered a slight scream and dropped her knife and fork into her plate. At another time Thomas would most certainly have laughed aloud at the unmistakable consternation produced by the announcement of his profession. As it was, he repressed his tendency to smile when he saw her lips whitened under the cruel apprehension that had sprung to life within her.

"You mistrust me, Miss North," he said, gravely.

"Oh, no," she returned, in a voice barely audible. And added immediately: "For pity's sake, sir, do you intend to print what I told you when I was so crazy awhile ago?"

"Do I, Miss North? It depends upon whether or not you go on with your dinner."

"Oh, how can you joke about a thing like this?"

"Miss North, I am not joking. I never was more serious in my life. It is absolutely imperative that you eat."

The poor girl tried to propitiate him by swallowing a few hasty mouthfuls, but it was evident that he had taken her appetite away. She regarded him with a look of pathetic appeal.

"Oh, sir," she exclaimed, suddenly. "I am only a poor girl, and chance has placed me completely at your mercy. Don't torment me, I beseech you. Tell me the worst at once. What do you intend to do with me?"

"To save you," answered Thomas. "To save me?" she repeated, helplessly. "From what?"

"From the consequences of your conduct."

"Mine?" she exclaimed. "What do you mean? I have done nothing."

"Pardon me," said Thomas. "You forget the pistol which you threw away, and your flight from home."

She stared at him for a long time like a statue.

"And you believe—" she began at last, with an awful look in her face. "I believe nothing," he interrupted. "So much as I believe you, Miss North. It is not a question of me, but of the police."

"The police?" she stammered.

"Miss North," said Thomas, "I would not frighten you needlessly, but I feel compelled to tell you that you have placed yourself in the eyes of the law in a very equivocal position. Unless you can give a full explanation of your conduct—"

"Oh, sir," she broke in, "I can tell the police nothing—absolutely nothing."

She wrung her hands and looked about her apprehensively.

"It's not because I am guilty of anything—oh, sir, you know that! But I cannot say what I have thought, what I have been compelled to believe in spite of myself. I have said things to you already when I did not realize what I was doing which I never meant to have repeated to any human being. And you—on your honor, sir!—won't you keep my secret?"

"I will do everything I can for your sister, for your sake," said Thomas. "But I must ask you one question. What reason had you to believe me guilty?"

"I do not believe it. No, I will not acknowledge that I ever really believed it. But for one moment when her strange actions seemed unaccountable upon any other supposition, I—but it was a mistake, sir. I am sure of it. She could explain everything if she would."

"There, there!" said Thomas, soothingly. "Don't get excited. You are as safe with me as you could possibly be with anyone. I simply wanted to have the assurance from your lips that you are unaware of the fact of any crime."

"Oh, believe me, sir."

"I do, Miss North. I believe you implicitly, and I will do everything in my power to help you."

"You are very noble, sir."

"You flatter me," said Thomas, averting his eyes. "I have sisters of my own, and—"

"And for their sakes—"

"No, for your sake," said Thomas, turning quickly to look toward the road.

"You spoke of that dreadful pistol, sir!" she cried, suddenly. "Tell me how you know!"

"I saw you, Miss North."

"And the pistol is—"

"In my pocket."

She stretched out her hands impulsively, while a wild light of hope lighted in her face.

"Give it to me," she exclaimed.

"Forgive me," said Thomas, "but I must refuse you that. Believe me, it pains me to be obliged to refuse you anything."

"You won't give it to me," she faltered. "And what then, do you propose to do with it?"

"I will be frank with you now as ever, Miss North," he said, in a low voice. "I intend to give it to the police."

Impulsively she brought her face very near to his and turned the light of her blue eyes full into his dark ones. It was an intense, fearful, searching stare, a look such as one might cast into the future at a fork in the road of life between lasting happiness and despair. His gaze never faltered, but hers did. She blushed and suddenly became self-conscious, and precipitately looked down at the ground.

"I will," she murmured, faintly. "You are in imminent danger," he said, hastily. "There is no time to lose. Follow me."

And as he turned from her she obeyed him with the trusting confidence of a little child.

CHAPTER XII.

THOMAS DECLINES TO STATE THEORIES.

About ten o'clock on Monday morning a telephone message came over the wires from the chief of police at Lynn to the Boston police headquarters, which seriously interfered with the habitual imperturbability of Inspector Applebee.

"Whatever does this signify?" he demanded of the chief inspector. "That youngest North girl has disappeared."

"Not!" exclaimed his superior, in a tone of surprise. "How could that be?"

"I don't know how it can be; it is," Applebee declared. "She left the house some time last evening. They did not discover her absence till this morning. A hurried search of the neighborhood traces her to the railroad station, where she took the last train for Boston."

"That's a queer family, anyhow," commented the chief inspector, with a very puzzled air. "Applebee, have you tried to ascertain whether there isn't insanity in the blood?"

"Plague take it! What was I thinking of not to have put a man to watch her last night? I thought of it, but it seemed an absurd precaution!"

fumed the inspector. However, her flight the minute the funeral is over does away with any lingering doubt I may have had of her complicity in the crime."

"Better put White on her track at once. Then see me and let us have a word or two."

Inspector White having been dispatched to the Eastern depot with instructions to find the fugitive at any cost, Inspector Applebee returned to the private office of his superior. The chief carefully closed the door.

"Applebee," he said, as he resumed his chair, "if I understand you definitely, there is nobody, so far as known, who benefits a cent by North's death except his daughter Stella."

"Exactly, inspector. You are to understand just that. There is not the slightest indication of robbery or theft. Both the property in the house and the personal property on North's person were intact. Nobody benefits but this girl. Just two months ago he took out a \$10,000 policy in her favor."

"Applebee," said the chief, "I begin to realize that we are in a very delicate position in this matter. It calls for our keenest discrimination and judgment."

"I should say as much."

"Let us see what we know. We have established circumstantially beyond a reasonable doubt the identity of the woman who was in the Marlboro street house at or after the time of North's death; the woman who, to say the least of it, must be an accessory after the fact."

"So, indeed."

"Instead of some adventures, the woman turns out to be North's own daughter, a mild-faced, innocent-looking girl of 17."

"So, indeed."

"Well, now to my mind, unless the girl is crazy (and we have no evidence that she is), she never could have shot her father."

"It's a pretty serious thing to charge her with it."

"You don't believe it?"

"I'm hardly prepared to dispute the evidence."

"Very well, then, there is only one explanation. She knows who did it, and she runs away to avoid questions."

"It looks so."

"And as she never could reconcile her conscience to such action unless the guilty party were very near or very dear to her—"

"